



21 June 2024

## Letter to Kosovo Public Broadcaster Board

Dear Chair of the RTK Board, Mr. Besnik Boletini,  
Dear members of the RTK Board,

We are writing to you on behalf of the partners of the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, which has actively monitored the developments concerning Kosovo's public broadcaster in the last three years. We have commended, at the Council of Europe level, your election as board members in a professional and transparent manner, with full inclusion of civil society.

We are however concerned by the growing crisis within Kosovo's Public Broadcaster (RTK) around political pressure being applied to remove the general director, Mr Shkumbin Ahmetxhekaj. This was first raised by former European Parliament Rapporteur for Kosovo MEP Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel [on 15 January 2024](#) where she mentioned the attempts to replace the current director with a pro government individual.

We write to remind you that any political interference in the management of the public broadcaster would be a gravely undemocratic act and your role as members of the board is to resist all such pressure.

Mr. Ahmetxhekaj was appointed General Director by your board in 2022 for a three-year mandate in an open and pluralistic procedure and has been leading RTK's reform and transformation. The appointment process was considered by the European Union and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe as [merit-based](#) and was welcomed by international organizations and [foreign embassies](#) present in Kosovo. Although the public broadcaster RTK lacks a sustainable financing model and is currently [at its lowest financing point in a decade, its financial management has improved significantly](#) as noted in your recent reaction as well as by the National Auditing Office. In addition, according to a [poll, the public broadcaster is currently the second](#) most credible television station in Kosovo. Such success is a result of the joint work of the RTK's board and the general director, indicating that Kosovo's broadcaster is fulfilling its mission to serve the public.

We kindly ask you to carefully consider your upcoming decisions and ensure that the public broadcaster continues to serve the public and not political interests. Media freedom, in general, and the ongoing reforms in the public broadcaster in particular, will seriously be harmed and undermined if politically motivated changes in the management of the public broadcaster are successful.



We have seen from our monitoring of threats across Europe how easy it is for governments to undermine the independence of public broadcasters, and how serious the effects of such politicization can be for society as a whole. The dismissal of public broadcaster directors for politically motivated reasons threatens media freedom, which are fundamental values of the Council of Europe, European Union and European Broadcasting Union.

The recently adopted European Media Freedom Act sets out minimum standards for ensuring the independence of public service media including that the heads of management shall be appointed “*on the basis of transparent, open, effective and non-discriminatory procedures and transparent, objective, non-discriminatory and proportionate criteria laid down in advance at national level*”, and that decisions on their dismissal before the end of their term of office must be “*duly justified*”, and “*may be taken only exceptionally where they no longer fulfil the conditions required for the performance of their duties*”.

Further, several Council of Europe Recommendations, including Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)1 to member States on Public Service Media Governance underlines and the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec (96) 10 on Independence of Public Service Media stress the importance of public broadcaster independence and that decisions on management should be duly reasoned and subject to the competent courts.

This is more important considering Kosovo's application for membership at the Council of Europe, which considers that independent public service media are a cornerstone of democracy and contribute to the reinforcement of social cohesion. The existence of an independent and professional public broadcaster is also a requirement in Kosovo's European Union accession process. Lastly, such decisions are relevant and important in Kosovo's public broadcaster's ongoing process to join the Eurovision Song Contest.

We invite you to continue joining forces with the director to push forward the ongoing reforms and work towards financial independence and improvement of work conditions of RTK's staff members.

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